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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000257

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION PARTY YOUTHS REPRESSED AND DIVIDED, YET
DETERMINED TO DEMONSTRATE MARCH 25

REF: A. MINSK 228

[B. MINSK 187](#)

[C. MINSK 209](#)

[D. 06 MINSK 1166](#)

[E. 06 MINSK 978](#)

[F. MINSK 249](#)

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

[11.](#) (C) Though divided by ideology and ambivalent about their national leaders, Belarus' opposition political party youth organizations uniformly plan to participate in the March 25 demonstration and will attend the tentatively scheduled April 21-22 democratic congress. The groups remain hopeful that the congress and the demonstration will renew interest and increase their ranks, despite intense GOB pressure. End Summary.

Current Plans Revolve Around March 25 Rally and Congress

[12.](#) (C) Political party youth leaders told Poloff that their members plan to participate in the upcoming March 25 demonstration as a means to drum up support and recruit new members. Even opposition communist Leninist Youth Union Chair Dmitriy Yanenko indicated that his members would participate "unofficially." (Note: Belarusian nationalists commemorate the anniversary of the creation of the short-lived independent Belarusian Republic on March 25, [1918](#). LYU tends to view the commemoration as "anti-communist." End note.) However, this determination to demonstrate bore a heavy toll. Opposition United Civic Party (UCP) Youth Wing Chair Kirill Ignatik related to Poloff that GOB pressure on his organization's approximately 700 members had intensified in the run up to the upcoming demonstration. On March 21, BPF Youth Wing Chair Ales Kalita politely refused to meet with Poloff before March 25 for fear that the GOB would detain him again (ref A). Nevertheless, he revealed that his 500 members would march in the March 25 demonstration.

[13.](#) (C) Despite ideological differences, most political party youth leaders told us that their members plan to participate in the upcoming (but still unscheduled) democratic congress of opposition forces. On March 22, Ignatik said that he supports holding a congress by April 21 and revealed that 24 members of his 700-member organization would participate in the congress with the goal of drafting a "little constitution," a plan for the democratization of Belarus (ref B). According to Ignatik, the goal of drafting such a plan could help reconcile many of the ideological differences between the free market-oriented UCP and the leftist opposition Belarusian Party of Communists (BPC) and Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Gramada" (BSDP). Similarly, Yanenko told Poloff that his BPC-affiliated 200 members support convening a congress as soon as possible to formally recognize the recently established Union of Leftist Parties and to boost popular interest in the opposition (ref C).

[14.](#) (C) Claiming 2,000 members, Malady Front (MF) Chairs Sergey Bakhun and Siarhey Lisichonak noted that MF will send 15 delegates to the congress as long as Milinkevich participates in the event; otherwise MF may pull out. When asked about opposition Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) Chair Vintsuk Vyachorka's compromise to maintain Milinkevich as head of the coalition, the MF leaders thought the proposal was sound but were skeptical that the other party leaders would ultimately accept Milinkevich as their leader.

Ambivalence about National Opposition Leaders

15. (C) Generally, these concerns about the congress shaped the youth leaders' broader ambivalence about their national opposition party leadership. Lisichonak and Bakhun told us that their organization had foreseen an inevitable conflict between the leftist bloc and UCP and BPF over socio-economic agendas and decided to back Milinkevich even before Belarus' 2006 presidential elections. Lisichonak praised Milinkevich for chairing an organization in support of imprisoned MF leader Dmitry Dashkevich and other repressed MF leaders (refD). However, Lisichonak and Bakhun sharply criticized Milinkevich's managerial skills and lack of reparation for the upcoming March 25 demonstration (ref E).

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16. (C) This ambivalence also extended to other party youth groups. For example, while conceding the enormous constraints faced by UCP Chair Anatoliy Lebedko, Ignatik noted his deep dissatisfaction with the low level of material support his members receive from their parent party's leadership. Moreover, BSDP Youth Wing Head Dmitriy Kruk expressed strong personal opposition to BSDP's participation in the leftist union and senior BSDP party directives to cooperate with BPC-affiliated youth as part of its broader local election campaign agreements with BPC last year (ref F). Despite his pledge to maintain his organization's autonomy, even if the leftist union subsumed BSDP itself, Kruk reluctantly conceded that his cooperation with the communist youth would have to continue because BSDP still values its alliance with BPC as a means of financial support for his organization.

Comment

17. (C) Despite the mixed feelings of opposition party youth activists regarding their national leaders, the party youth wings, with the possible exception of Malady Front, strongly support the views and aspirations of their respective "parent" organizations. Unfortunately, party youth activists are experiencing similar difficulty in widening their membership and support base. However, we admire the courage and determination of these young Belarusians to take full advantage of the upcoming March 25 demonstration and other planned rallies to recruit new activists.
Stewart